Requests in Japanese:
A Study through E-mail Messages

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Abstract

Although Japanese people have been often said to be indirect, the results of some recent studies (e.g., Fukushima 1996; Fukushima 2000; Rose 1994; Rose 1996) challenge this prevailing belief. This study attempts to investigate Japanese requests in present day Japan to examine this alternative viewpoint. The data used in this study were e-mail messages of requests by Japanese university students. Direct-indirect and informal-formal scales were taken into account in determining the request strategies and eight request strategies were used in the analysis. The results showed that bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies, which were direct and informal, were most frequently used, when there was no power difference between S and H and when S and H were close. The data collection method and a channel of communication may have influenced low occurrence of off-record strategies.

Keywords: politeness, Japanese, e-mail, requests

1. Background of This Study

1.1. *The Japanese*

The Japanese have often been described as being indirect in previous studies (e.g., Clancy 1986; Lebra 1976; Nakane 1970; Okabe 1983; Yamda 1994). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Japanese culture is considered to be a negative politeness culture, i.e., one in which distance and deference are displayed. Some recent studies have challenged this characterization. For instance, Fukushima (1996) compared request strategies by British and Japanese informants respectively, showing that more direct forms were used by Japanese than by British informants. The results in Fukushima (2000), which also compared British English and Japanese request strategies, showed that Japanese informants selected more direct request strategies than British counterparts in half of the situations investigated. Likewise, Rose (1994) showed that the Japanese were more direct in making requests than the Americans. Rose (1996) also showed that indirect requests in American English were common, and challenged the stereotypical notion of the difference between American English and Japanese, with the former characterized as being explicit and direct, and

the latter as being vague and indirect.

More recently, Hori (2000), who collected Japanese data from the beginning of the 1980's to the late 1990's, reports that the young Japanese are less concerned with power difference. Her data suggest that the young Japanese do not use negative politeness strategies, even in situations where there is a power difference between interlocutors. According to Hori (2000: 61), young people's speech has become less formal. Whereas in the past it was common to use last names in Japan, Hori (2000: 61) observes that these days many young Japanese people use first names and that girls talked like boys, deliberately using the masculine first person pronoun and masculine ending and particles.

1.2. *Request Strategies*

In this section, I will briefly review and consider some different ways of analyzing data and of classifying request strategies in previous politeness studies and try to identify a way of filling the gap in this study.

According to Spencer-Oatey (2000: 21), there have been mainly three types analysis for speech act utterances: (1) the selection of speech act components, (2) the degree of directness/indirectness and (3) the type and amount of upgraders/downgraders. According to the first type, the data are analyzed into head acts and supportive moves (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 21-22). According to the second type, the data are analyzed into direct, indirect and non-conventionally indirect strategies (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 22-25). The third type identifies upgraders and downgraders in the data, the former strengthening the positive impact associated with the speech act, the latter weakening it (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 25).

Since this study is concerned only with head acts and does not investigate upgraders/downgraders, the second type is most closely related with this study. With the second type, the three strategies, i.e., direct strategies, conventionally indirect strategies and non-conventionally indirect/off-record strategies, are used in many studies. For example, Rinnenrt and Kobayashi (1999: 1197) classified Japanese requests into the above three. Fukushima (2000) also used the above three in comparing the requests by British and Japanese informants. Hiraga and Turner (1996), who have also compared British English and Japanese, used those three request strategies, although they have termed them as direct requests, indirect requests and hints. Trosborg (1995) categorized the requests into four, i.e., indirect request (hints), conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented conditions), conventionally indirect (speaker-based conditions) and direct requests, but as she simply subcategorized conventionally indirect requests into two subcategories, it can be said that she also follows the above three choices. Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989: 278-281) classify request strategies into nine strategy types on a scale of indirectness (1. Mood derivable 2. Explicit performatives 3. Hedged performatives 4. Locution derivable 5. Want statement 6. Suggestory formulae 7.

Preparatory 8. Strong hint 9. Mild hint). Blum-Kulka and House (1989: 123-124), however, using Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) above scheme, classify the first five strategies as impositives, strategies 6 and 7 as conventionally indirect strategies and the last two as hints or non-conventionally indirect strategies. In short, it can be said that the three choices, i.e., direct strategies, conventionally indirect strategies and non-conventionally indirect/off-record strategies, are the main stream. And some other studies (e.g., Kasper 1994: 3208; Olshtain and Blum-Kulka 1985: 305) also confirmed these three choices.

I believe that these three strategies used in the second type correspond to Brown and Levinson's (1987) bald-on-record, negative politeness and off-record strategies, their second strategy (positive politeness) and their fifth strategy (Don't do the FTAs) being omitted. As Brown and Levinson's fifth strategy is "not to do or say anything", we do not have to include that when we analyze the data, in which requests have been already made. Positive politeness strategies, however, have been neglected in politeness research, as Spencer-Oatey (2000: 13) and Pizziconi (2003: 1473) point out. In Fukushima (2000), positive politeness strategies were not included, because the three choices used in the questionnaire were on a direct-indirect scale in which it is not possible to fit positive politeness strategies (Fukushima 2000: 153-154). Although Hiraga and Turner (1996) have compared the informants' attention to the negative face or positive face of the requestee, they did not consider positive politeness strategies, nor did they offer an explanation for this omission. The present study attempts to fill this gap.

Eelen (2001: 4-5) characterizes positive politeness as "prefacing the request with a compliment constitutes a positive politeness strategy ('What a lovely dress you're wearing tonight …')". Similarly, Watts (2003: 89-90) gives his own examples and shows that positive politeness is a preface to a request (e.g. Jim, you're really good at solving computer problems. →(FTA) I wonder if you could just help me with a little formatting problem I've got). If positive politeness strategies are prefaces to requests, they are different from other request strategies in nature, as the other request strategies are requests and not prefaces to requests.

Although there are different viewpoints on positive politeness strategies, I interpret positive politeness strategies as those used to show closeness and solidarity, as Brown and Levinson (1987: 101-102) state that the linguistic realizations of positive politeness are in many respects simply representative of the normal linguistic behavior between intimates and that positive politeness techniques are usable as a kind of social accelerator, where S indicates that he wants to "come closer" to H. By contrast, negative politeness strategies show deference and distance. In the present study, both positive and negative politeness strategies will be considered, together with bald-on-record and off-record strategies.

As stated above, the three strategies (bald-on-record, negative politeness and off-record strategies), which have been used in many previous studies, are based on the direct-indirect scale. I believe

that formality level is also important when considering politeness. Therefore, I will consider both directness and formality levels in this study. I will explain the request strategies used in this study in 2.3.3, taking both directness and formality levels into account.

2. The Study

In this study, I will further investigate Japanese language by young Japanese people in contemporary Japan to see what kind of request strategies are used.

2.1. *Informants*

Fourteen Japanese university students (mean age: 20.57; age range: 20-22) served as the informants in this study.

2.2. *Data Collection*

The informants assembled a corpus of the e-mail messages they sent and received. From these, they selected the e-mail messages containing requests, which they thought they could make public. In this way, a possible ethical problem could be avoided.

The choice of e-mail messages, now a widely used form of communication, has the benefit of drawing on samples of authentic language in a non-spoken form, using a channel of communication which exhibits many of the characteristics of written language, while also embodying some of the features of informal spoken communication. Since the samples are from actual, authentic contexts, the limitations inherent in hypothetical data (as in DCTs) as criticized by Xie (2003: 816) are much reduced.

2.3. *Data Analysis*

2.3.1. *The Quality of Requests*

In order to limit the range of contexts in which the requests were made, the following constraints were applied to the data.

(1) The e-mail messages which were sent from one person to many people (e.g., announcing the change of mail address) were excluded, because of the complexity of defining the relationships between S and H in such situations. Consequently, only the messages sent from one person to a single other person were used.

(2) There may be differences in requests depending on their location in a request-compliance
or-refusal sequence. Requests which are made after compliance may be more direct than the
initial request, while requests which follow refusal may be more indirect than the initial request.
As there were only ten requests that followed a refusal in the corpus, the analysis was confined
to initial requests in such sequences.

(3) There may be also differences in requests asking for information, and those asking for action,
with the former being more direct because the imposition in such requests may be lower than
in the latter. As only sixteen requests for information occurred in the corpus, they were excluded
from the data.

As a result of this sorting process, one hundred and sixty-four requests were available for analysis.

2.3.2. *Head Acts*

Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989: 275-289) present the coding manual to identify the request sequence to
be analyzed, which includes head acts, alerters and supportive moves. A head act is the minimal unit
which can realize a request; it is the core of the request sequence (Blum-Kulka, et al. 1989: 275).
An alerter is an opening element preceding the actual request, such as a term of address or an attention
getter (Blum-Kulka, et al. 1989: 276). A supportive move is a unit external to the request, which
modifies its impact by either aggravating or mitigating its force (Blum-Kulka, et al. 1989: 276).
In this study, only head acts were analyzed, because, although the corpus includes other elements,
such as supportive moves and alerters, it was beyond the scope of this study to include these.

2.3.3. *Request Strategies in This Study*

In considering request strategies, I had two scales in mind: (1) a direct-indirect scale and (2) an
informal-formal scale for the following reasons: (1) Even within the same strategy, there are
differences in the level of directness or formality. (2) As stated in 1.2., request strategies in many
studies in the past were classified according to a direct-indirect scale and positive politeness
strategies have been rather neglected, because they do not fit this scale.

On a direct-indirect scale, bald-on-record strategies are on the most direct side and off-record
strategies are on the most indirect side. Negative politeness strategies are somewhere in between. When
we consider an informal-formal scale, positive politeness strategies are on the most informal side and
negative politeness strategies are on the most formal side. When we combine these two scales, it
is possible to include positive politeness strategies, and the characteristics of each strategy become
clear. Having these two scales in mind, I will investigate each request strategy more in detail.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 95), direct imperatives stand out as clear examples of

bald-on-record usage. Therefore, bald-on-record strategies are direct, but there is a difference in formality. In Japanese, such gerundive forms as "*...shite*" 'Do this.' and "*...shite kudasai*" 'Do this, please.' can be classified into bald-on-record strategies, as they express the request directly and clearly. However, the two requests above with "*... shite*" 'Do this.' and "*... shite kudasai*" 'Do this, please.' differ in formality, the former being less formal than the latter. In the present study, the former is categorized as bald-on-record 1 strategies (B1), the latter as bald-on-record strategies 2 (B2).

Positive politeness strategies can be deployed in order to show closeness. Such requests are considered to be informal. The forms used as positive politeness strategies are not as fixed as imperatives in bald-on-record strategies. Since there have been few studies on positive politeness especially in Japanese, it is difficult to determine the forms of positive politeness strategies in Japanese. The forms used as positive politeness strategies in our data include "gerundive forms with final particles showing familiarity, *ne*", "declaratives" and "interrogatives". In positive politeness strategies, there is a difference in the level of directness. Such interrogative form as "*...shite kurenai?*" 'Can't you do …?' is more indirect than "*...shite ne*" 'Do …+ suffix.' (gerundive + the final particle "*ne*" showing familiarity used among close people) or "*...shite hoshii*" 'I want you to do …', because the interrogative form gives an option to H to comply. The former (interrogative) was categorized as positive politeness strategies 2 (P2), the latter (gerundive + the final particle and declarative) as positive politeness strategies 1 (P1).

Negative politeness strategies are deployed to show deference. They are considered to be formal. In negative politeness strategies, there is a difference in the level of directness depending on the form, so that an interrogative form (e.g., "*...shite itadake nai deshouka?* 'Couldn't you do …?') which gives an option to H, is more indirect than the declarative, indicating "desire" (e.g., "*...shite itadakitaku zonjimasu.*" 'I'd like you to do …'). The former was categorized as negative politeness strategies 2 (N2) and the latter as negative politeness strategies 1 (N1).

Off-record strategies are indirect, as they do not attribute only one clear communicative intention (Brown and Levinson 1987: 211). The actor leaves himself an "out" by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 211). Not only can the actor avoid the responsibility, but I believe that s/he can also show *enryo* 'being reserved' with off-record strategies. S and H share a lot of background knowledge when off-record strategies are used, otherwise, it is difficult for H to infer S's desires. There is a difference in formality in off-record strategies. They were categorized into two, depending on the level of formality, although there are no fixed forms for off-record strategies. Informal off-record strategies were categorized as off-record strategies (1) (O1) and formal off-record strategies were categorized as off-record strategies 2 (O2).

As a result, the following eight request strategies were used to analyze the requests in this study: bald-on-record strategies (1), bald-on-record strategies (2), positive politeness strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (2), negative politeness strategies (1), negative politeness strategies (2), off-record

strategies (1) and off-record strategies (2). Among these strategies, bald-on-record strategies (1) and bald-on-record strategies (2) are the most direct, and off-record strategies (1) and off-record strategies (2) are the most indirect. Bald-on-record strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (2) and off-record strategies (1) are informal, and bald-on-record strategies (2), negative politeness strategies (1), negative politeness strategies (2) and off-record strategies (2) are formal. Thus, bald-on-record strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (1) are categorized in a direct-informal domain, bald-on-record strategies (2) and negative politeness strategies (1) being categorized in a direct-formal domain, positive politeness strategies (2) and off-record strategies (1) being categorized in an informal-indirect domain, and negative politeness strategies (2) and off-record strategies (2) being categorized in a formal-indirect domain.

2.3.4. *Procedure of Data Analysis*

There are three stages in the analysis of the data. First, all the requests were classified into the following eight strategies: bald-on-record strategies 1 (B1), bald-on-record strategies 2 (B2), positive politeness strategies 1 (P1), positive politeness strategies 2 (P2), negative politeness strategies 1 (N1), negative politeness strategies 2 (N2), off-record strategies 1 (O1) and off-record strategies 2 (O2). Secondly, all the requests were investigated on the basis of the relationship between S and H (power and distance) and the degree of imposition of the requested act. Thirdly, all the requests were further classified according to the combinations of power, distance and imposition. This resulted in a list of twelve conditions, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Specification of Twelve Conditions

Condition	Power Difference between S and H	Distance between S and H	Degree of Imposition
1	+ (S>H)	+	High
2	+ (S>H)	+	Low
3	+ (S>H)	-	High
4	+ (S>H)	-	Low
5	+ (S<H)	+	High
6	+ (S<H)	+	Low
7	+ (S<H)	-	High
8	+ (S<H)	-	Low
9	-	+	High
10	-	+	Low
11	-	-	High
12	-	-	Low

Power +: There is a power difference between S and H.
S>H: S has more power than H.
S<H: H has more power than H.
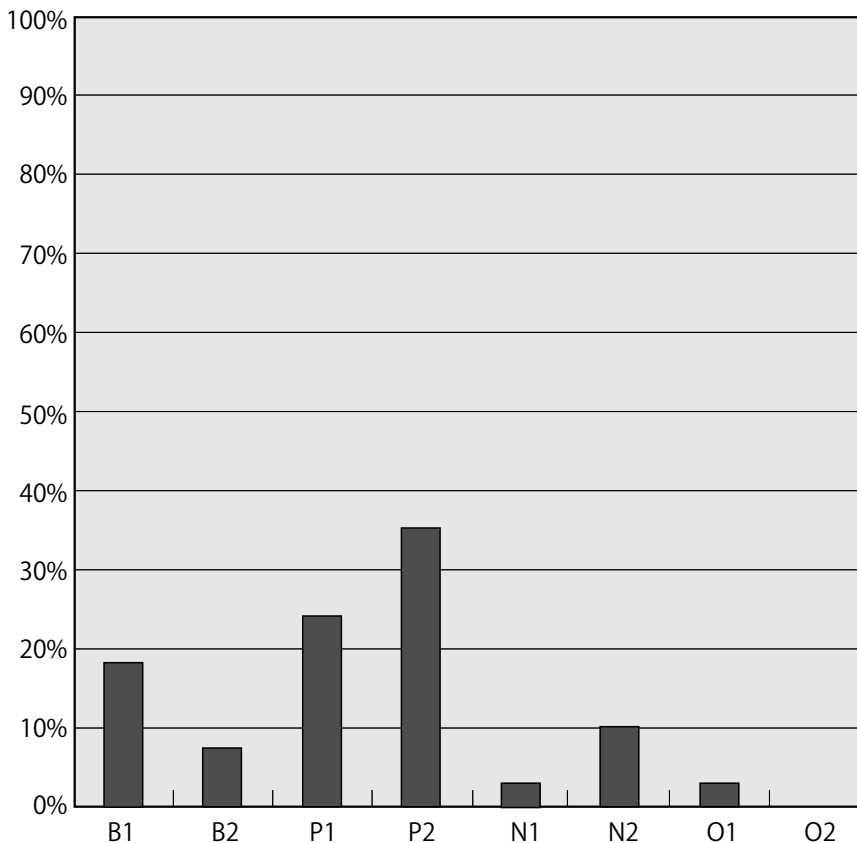
Power-: There is no power difference between S and H.

Distance+: S and H are not close.
Distance-: S and H are close

3. Results

The results of the first analysis reveal that bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies were frequently used, with forty-one bald-on-record strategies (B1: 30; B2: 11), and ninety-seven positive politeness strategies (P1: 39; P2: 58) out of one hundred and sixty-four requests (See Graph 1).

Graph 1. Distribution of Request Strategies

B1= Bald-on-record strategies (1)　　B2= Bald-on-record strategies (2)
P1= Positive politeness strategies (1)　　P2= Positive politeness strategies (2)
N1= Negative politeness strategies (1)　　N2= Negative politeness strategies (2)
O1= Off-record strategies (1)　　O2= Off-record strategies (2)

The results of the second analysis show that the majority of requests were made between people who were equal (N=112) and people who were close (N=144) (See Tables 2 and 3). Most of the requests involved a low degree of imposition (N=111) (See Table 4).

Table 2. Distribution of Request Strategies under Different Conditions of Power

	Bald-on-record		Positive Politeness		Negative Politeness		Off-record		Total
	B 1	B 2	P 1	P 2	N 1	N 2	O 1	O 2	
P+(S>H)	3 (15.8%)	3 (15.8%)	5 (26.3%)	5 (26.3%)	1 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (10.5%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)
P+(S<H)	7 (21.2%)	3 (9.1%)	4 (12.1%)	2 (6.1%)	4 (12.1%)	13 (39.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	33 (100%)
P-	20 (17.9%)	5 (4.5%)	30 (26.7%)	51 (45.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.7%)	3 (2.7%)	0 (0%)	112 (100%)

  P+(S>H): S has more power than H.
  P+(S<H): H has more power than S.
  P-: There is no power difference between S and H.

Table 3. Distribution of Request Strategies under Different Conditions of Distance

	Bald-on-record		Positive Politeness		Negative Politeness		Off-record		Total
	B 1	B 2	P 1	P 2	N 1	N 2	O 1	O 2	
D+	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	6 (30%)	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%)
D-	28 (19.4%)	9 (6.3%)	38 (26.4%)	52 (36.1%)	2 (1.4%)	11 (7.6%)	4 (2.8%)	0 (0%)	144 (100%)

  D+: S and H are not close.
  D-: S and H are close.

Table 4. Distribution of Request Strategies under Different Conditions of Imposition

	Bald-on-record		Positive Politeness		Negative Politeness		Off-record		Total
	B 1	B 2	P 1	P 2	N 1	N 2	O 1	O 2	
IH	6 (11%)	2 (4%)	8 (15%)	22 (42%)	5 (9%)	8 (15%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	53 (100%)
IL	24 (22%)	9 (8%)	31 (28%)	36 (32%)	0 (0%)	8 (7%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	111 (100%)

  IH: Imposition is high.
  IL: Imposition is low.

This tendency was a reflection of the university students' e-mail messages. That is, they exchange e-mails among their friends, most of them being equal and close. And the requests they made are not very high in the degree of imposition. From the first and second analyses, it can be said that among people who are equal in status and close in distance, bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies are very frequently used.

The third analysis reveals that most of the requests (N=77) were made under the twelfth condition shown in Table 1 (when there was no power difference between S and H, when S and H were

close, and when the imposition of the requested act was low) and under this condition positive politeness strategies were most frequently used (P1: 25; P2: 29), followed by bald-on-record strategies (B1: 16; B2: 2) (See Graph 2). The linguistic realizations of the strategies are summarized in Table 5 (There was a strategy, off-record strategies 2, however, no off-record strategies 2 were found in the data. Therefore, off-record strategies 2 were not listed in Table 5).

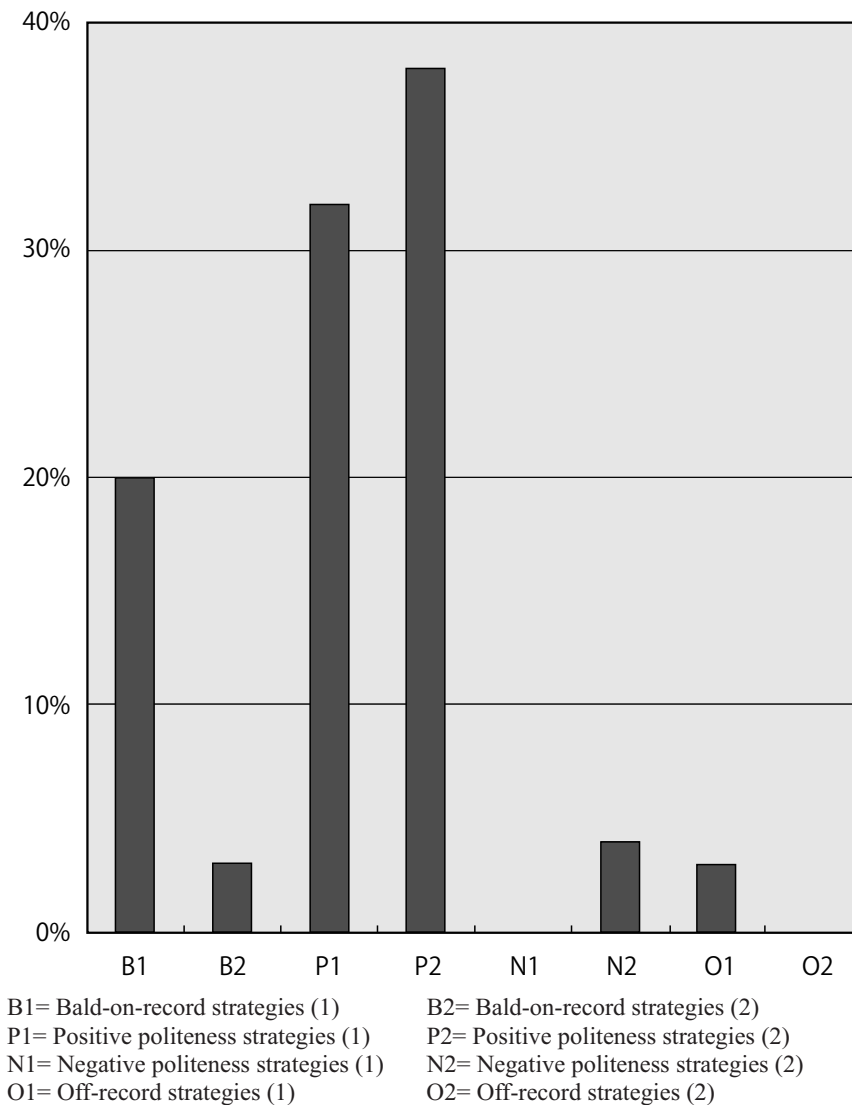**Graph 2.** Distribution of Request Strategies under the Twelfth Condition

B1= Bald-on-record strategies (1)　　B2= Bald-on-record strategies (2)
P1= Positive politeness strategies (1)　　P2= Positive politeness strategies (2)
N1= Negative politeness strategies (1)　　N2= Negative politeness strategies (2)
O1= Off-record strategies (1)　　O2= Off-record strategies (2)

Table 5. Classification of Request Strategies and Their Realization

Strategy	Feature	Condition	Form / Category	Example	English Gloss
Bald-on-record strategies 1	stating the request directly and informally	when S and H are equal when S and H are close when the imposition is low	Gerundive form (*te* form)	*Bangou oshiete*	Tell me your number.
Bald-on-record strategies 2	stating the request directly and formally	when S and H are close when the imposition is low	Gerundive form + *kudasai*	*Renraku kudasai*	Please get in touch with me.
Positive politeness strategies 1	stating the request directly and informally	when S and H are equal when S and H are close when the imposition is low	Gerundive form + final particle *ne* Desire	*Meiru shite ne.* *Tetsudatte hoshii*	Give me a mail, will you? I want you to help me.
Positive politeness strategies 2	stating the request indirectly and informally	when S and H are equal when S and H are close	Interrogative	*Baito yattemitai ko ga itara oshiete moraeru?*	Can you let me know if there is anyone who would like to do this part-time job?
Negative politeness strategies 1	stating the request directly and formally	from inferiors to superiors when the imposition is high	Desire	*Gorenrakuo itadaki taku zonjimasu*	I'd like you to contact me.
Negative politeness strategies 2	stating the request indirectly and formally	from inferiors to superiors	Interrogative Desire (formal)	*Nittei o henkou shite itadake masen deshouka* *Massage onegai shitain desuga*	Couldn't you change the schedule? I'd like to have a massage.
Off-record strategies 1	stating the request indirectly and informally	when S and H are close	Statement (hint)	*Watashi choukyori unten nigate nano*	I'm not good at driving long distance.

4. Discussion

4.1. *Directness and Formality Levels among Status Equals*

In this study, using e-mail data, most requests were made among people who were equal in status and people who were close in distance, and they were communicating with one another via e-mail. Bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies were the strategies most frequently used. As shown in the previous literature summarized in 1.1., there is a prevailing belief that the Japanese are indirect, but the results here indicate that Japanese informants used bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies, which are rather direct, very often.

One of the reasons why direct and informal requests were frequently used may be due to the fact that the informants were university students and they were equal in status and close in distance.

Another reason may be that the requests were with low imposition. If the requests had been with high imposition, the informants might have used other request strategies than direct and informal requests. The medium might also have influenced the result. Even though e-mail data are written, young people tend to treat e-mail messages as a form of conversation, as confirmed by the informants in this study who told me that sending e-mails was "like chatting". It may be said that in e-mails they use more informal ways of expression than in other means of written communication, e.g., letters, although both of them are authentic written data.

E-mail data have another characteristic. As compared with speech, e-mail communication is characterized by "metacommunicative minimalism", which means that "Phatic or metacommunicative cues, the linguistic and paralinguistic signs that maintain cognizance of the social relation between the sender and the receiver of a message, are drastically reduced in this medium" (Crystal 2001: 41). Therefore, e-mail messages sometimes create an impression of brusqueness. One way of mitigating such brusqueness is through the use of pictographs or emoticons.

In e-mail messages by the young Japanese, many pictographs are usually used. According to Yoshioka (2006: 32), pictographs are used in order to express solidarity, while Inoue (2006: 62) argues that pictographs can give the message a context, replacing the tone of voice or facial expressions. Inoue (2006: 62-63) further claims that pictographs or emoticons serve as softeners for brusque and cold messages. There were also pictographs in the data of the present study, but they were not included in the analysis. If the data had been analyzed with pictographs, it would have been more interesting and more detailed results could have been obtained. For example, there may be a case in which bald-on-record strategies are used, but the request does not sound brusque when accompanied by pictographs.

The infrequent occurrence of off-record strategies may be attributable also to the channel of communication, e-mail, increasing opportunities for ambiguity and misunderstanding. When S uses an off-record strategy in an e-mail request, there is less guarantee that H will recognize that a request has been made than in other means of communication, e.g., face-to-face. Via e-mail, H reads only the messages and there are no other factors (such as facial expressions, tone of voice, or the surrounding circumstances), which exist in other means of communication, such as face-to-face. This makes it difficult for H to recognize that requests were made, using off-record strategies. It is possible, therefore, that off-record requests are avoided in e-mail communication because of the constraints of the medium, which can be mitigated by recourse to using on-record requests. Further research on the use of politeness strategies in e-mail will be needed to reveal what patterns of use are emerging among Japanese users.

Bald-on-record strategies were used when S and H were equal, when S and H were close, and when the imposition was low (the twelfth condition in Table 1). According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 69), bald-on-record strategies are used (1) when there is a demand for speaking with maximum

efficiency (e.g., in emergencies), (2) when the overall weightiness of the FTA is very small, (3) when the FTA is perceived as being in the H's interest, and (4) when S is vastly superior in power to H. Only the second condition was found in this study, i.e., the imposition of the requested act was low. The other three conditions did not occur, but instead, two other conditions, which were not included in Brown and Levinson (1987: 69) were found: when S and H are equal and when S and H are close.

In contrast to the present study, the majority of the requests in the naturally occurring data by Rinnert and Kobayashi (1999) were made from higher to lower status, and their results showed that there were greater number of hints, fewer direct requests, and fewest conventionally indirect requests in Japanese (Rinnert and Kobayashi 1999: 1186-1187). According to Rinnert and Kobayashi (1999: 1195), one of the limitations of their study is the relatively small number of requests between equals in Japanese. The present study, using data between people with equal status, fills this gap. The results of these studies with two different ranges of requests, i.e., one being between people with high status and low status, another being between people with equal status, suggest that Japanese people differentiate their request strategies according to the power relationship between S and H. This may coincide with the argument by Holden (1983), who maintains that Japanese is far more explicit than English where social status relations are concerned. I think it is dangerous to dichotomize that Japanese is indirect and English is direct. It is not that simple, and as the results of this study show, the generalization that the Japanese are indirect is sometimes wrong. Further research is needed to investigate more in detail whether the Japanese differentiate strategies according to the relationship between S and H, and if so, how they do that.

Since 84% of the requests in this study involved bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies, it is difficult to draw any conclusions concerning the use of negative politeness strategies among the informants concerned. With this limitation in mind, the data show that negative politeness strategies were used when there was a power difference, i.e., when the requester was lower than the requestee in status (four negative politeness strategies (1) and thirteen negative politeness strategies (2)) (See Table 2). This confirms the function of negative politeness strategies, i.e., to show deference. This differs from Hori's (2000) study, in which her informants made little use of negative politeness strategies, the present study suggesting that young Japanese people still use negative politeness strategies when they make requests to people who are higher in status than they are.

As far as off-record strategies are concerned, it is equally difficult to draw any conclusions, as there were only five off-record strategies (1) and there were no off-record strategies (2). However, four off-record strategies (1) were used when S and H were close, while one was used when S and H were not close. It may be possible to conclude that the function of off-record strategies (1) is to show solidarity. This coincides with the claim made by Rinnert and Kobayashi (1999: 1192-1193), although they did not distinguish off-record requests as in this study and their situation involved face-to-face among unequals in an office.

4.2. *Request Strategies and Further Research*

Now I would like to consider which request strategies have the function to show closeness and solidarity in Japanese and I will suggest further areas of research. Bald-on-record strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (2) were frequently used among equal and close people in this study. In Japanese, it is common to use direct and informal forms among equal and close people. When S uses indirect or formal forms to H, who is close and equal, S consciously does so for some reason, such as being angry with H, thus keeping a distance toward H, or the imposition of the requested act is extremely high. In such a case, H may notice that it is not normal. It may be said that direct and informal forms, such as bald-on-record strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (2), can show closeness. The function of showing closeness was not included in bald-on-record strategies described by Brown and Levinson (1987), but as the results here show, closeness is expressed through the use of bald-on-record strategies in Japanese. It can be also said that the distinction between bald-on-record strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (2) is not very clear in Japanese. Further research is needed to investigate which strategies have the function of showing closeness and whether people differentiate bald-on-record (1), positive politeness strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (2) in Japanese, and if so, when and how they differentiate them.

These results partially confirmed the modification I (Fukushima 2000: 193-195) made to Brown and Levinson's (1987) classification of politeness strategies and culture in the sense that there is a category in Japanese language in which showing closeness/solidarity is important.   In Fukushima (2000: 193-195), a subcategory, in which bald-on-record strategies are used, was added. It was considered that the payoffs of that subcategory were to claim that the act is not an FTA, but they are to show/strengthen solidarity.

Not only bald-on-record strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (2), but also off-record strategies (1) may serve the function of showing closeness and strengthen solidarity, as discussed above. Showing closeness and solidarity may be the function of all the request strategies, which were categorized in informal domains (direct-informal and indirect-informal domains), i.e., bald-on-record strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (1), positive politeness strategies (2) and off-record strategies (1). However, since the number of off-record strategies was so limited, the function of off-record strategies is not as clear as that of the other strategies. Further research will be needed to examine the function of off-record strategies in Japanese.

Since the data of this study concentrated on those among students who were equal and close, further investigation is needed on the data among different relationships, e.g., among people who have different social status or who are not close.

The contextual variables investigated here need to be further examined. Spencer-Oatey (2000: 38) points out that Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holtgraves and Yang (1992) have different viewpoints concerning the contextual variables. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose an additive model of contextual variables, suggesting that speakers make an overall assessment of the amount of facework required by adding up the amount of power difference and distance between S and H, and the degree of imposition. On the other hand, Holtgraves and Yang (1992: 252) suggest that when any of the three interpersonal variables reaches a particularly high level, the effects of the remaining variables lessen or drop out completely. I believe that in many situations, people judge these variables intuitively. Only on a special occasion, for example, when S wants a big favor from H, which may incur a high degree of imposition on H, S places special attention on the strategy and tries to be polite, regardless of the relationship with H, as Holtgraves and Yang (1992) claim. How the informants have considered the three variables cannot be judged from this study. It is difficult to trace how the informants have considered those variables when we deal with naturally occurring data, but it is hoped that future studies will clarify how informants consider those variables.

Another problem concerning the contextual variables is that there may be individual differences in the way people perceive these variables. For example, one may perceive the degree of imposition of a certain act as low, whereas another may perceive the same act as high imposition. That is, S and H do not necessarily have the same perception. This applies not only to the degree of imposition, but also to such interpersonal variables as power and distance between S and H. S may regard H as a close person, but there may be a case that H does not regard S as a close person. This may cause some problems. For instance, when S uses a certain strategy, believing that H is close to S, but if H does not regard S as a close person, H may feel that the strategy S used was not appropriate. As a result, H may feel offended, or may have a negative evaluation of S (See Fukushima 2004; Fukushima 2010). Actually, one of the informants, who received an off-record strategy (1) from a senior colleague at a part-time job, reported that S may have regarded her (H) as a close person, but she (H) does not regard him (S) as such. As this example shows, there may be cases in which there is a mismatch between S and H in their perception of relationship, which will result in inappropriate use of request strategies and negative evaluation by H. Further investigation on the perception of the contextual variables and the use of request strategies as well as the evaluation by H will be needed.

One of the features of this study was the inclusion of positive politeness strategies. It appears that positive politeness strategies are used these days much more than before, especially in Japan. Usami (1997: 276-277) comments that in present day Japan people tend to be identified as equal rather than superior or inferior and the use of positive politeness strategies is spreading. Hori (2000: 68) points out that "… societal evaluation based on power and hierarchy has been undergoing a radical change. It is a trend now to show concern for the environment and sympathy and consideration to other people. Such attitudes are not very different from the attitude defined as positive politeness."

Yoshioka (2004; 2006: 30-31) also points out that there is a tendency among the young Japanese to use positive politeness strategies. It appears that in contemporary Japan, people want to show closeness. There seems to be, however, no established system to express closeness in Japanese, as Hori (2000: 68) claims, and there are very few studies on positive politeness strategies in Japanese. Tsuda (1999) has written an article entitled "Positive politeness strategies in Japanese", but she does not clarify positive politeness strategies in Japanese. More research is needed to investigate positive politeness strategies in Japanese in more detail. It is also necessary to examine whether forms and categories classified in positive politeness strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (2) in this study can be generalized to a certain extent and to investigate whether or on which occasions positive politeness strategies are used in Japanese.

Taking both direct-indirect and informal-formal scales into account when classifying request strategies was another feature of the present study, because only a direct-indirect scale has been considered in politeness research. Eight request strategies were classified according to these two scales, resulting in four domains, i.e., direct-informal, direct-formal, indirect-informal and indirect-formal. However, as the results of this study showed, the function of bald-on-record strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (1), which were categorized in a direct-informal domain, and the function of positive politeness strategies (2) and off-record strategies (1), which were categorized in an indirect-informal domain, were similar, although there was a difference in the level of directness. This suggests that the functions of request strategies in the four domains were not always different. Further investigation on how to classify request strategies is necessary.

It is worth considering the effect of the data collection procedure and context and their effects on choice of request strategies. In the present study, authentic data were collected from naturally occurring contexts, whereas the data elicited via MCQs (Multiple Choice Questionnaires) and DCTs (Discourse Completion Tests) typically require respondents to select or formulate hypothetical spoken responses in face-to-face contexts described in the prompt. It is possible, therefore, that the data elicitation procedure will influence the kinds of request strategies employed. For instance, Hiraga and Turner (1996) used DCTs in which the Japanese informants chose off-record strategies frequently. Likewise, the results of Rose and Ono (1995) show the potential effects of the data collection method, more off-record strategies being chosen when MCQs rather than DCTs were used. So, the effects of the data collection methodology need to be further investigated.

5. Conclusion

This study dealt with requests in Japanese among undergraduates. The data consisted of an authentic corpus of e-mail messages. The results reveal that the Japanese informants used bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies very frequently, which contradicts the prevailing stereotype that the Japanese people are indirect. Furthermore, it appears that bald-on-record strategies (1),

positive politeness strategies (1) and positive politeness strategies (2) have the function of showing closeness in Japanese. The data may have been influenced by the relationship between S and H, the degree of imposition and the channel of communication, i.e., e-mail. It is hoped that further research will be conducted in order to examine Japanese requests more in detail, for example, having more varieties in the relationship between S and H, and different degrees of imposition. Analysis and comparison of different data elicitation methods, including the use of e-mail, are also needed, particularly with the widespread use of e-mail as a means of communication.

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